

A House Divided: The Politics of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*

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Throughout history kingdoms and empires have been built on the foundation of struggle and established against the cornerstone of opposition. However, when scanning our world's historical timeline we find not only military conflict among nations, but conflict and struggle within the sociopolitical sphere. From David's conquest of ancient Jerusalem to the fall of the Roman Empire, many writers have bore record of the social and political struggles of his or her time. Thomas Kyd is among such writers who, during a period of severe social and political unrest in Europe, captures Spain's sixteenth-century sociopolitical struggles in his work *The Spanish Tragedy*. Analyzing conflict in the play, Frank Ardolino in "Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*" says some critics believe Kyd is alluding to the historical national conflict between Spain and England in the last decades of the sixteenth century. Christopher Crosbie in "Oeconomia and the Vegetative Soul" says Kyd presents class struggle, pointing to Hieronimo and Horatio as the "middling sort" in competition with the aristocracy. Although *The Spanish Tragedy* touches on issues of international warfare and interclass conflict, when we also consider Bel-Imperia and her want for revenge, her constant competition with her brother Lorenzo, and her defiance against her father and uncle's marital arrangement, we may also view *The Spanish Tragedy* as a play about gender struggle. When we couple the play's portrayal of gender struggle with class antagonism, we eventually see a drama that captures the struggles of the socially and politically marginalized.

The key is to not limit *The Spanish Tragedy* to a single idea. Rather, we must view the drama as a holistic and all encompassing depiction of struggle that afflicted sixteenth-century Spain. In reproducing Spain's sixteenth-century political world, Kyd writes *The Spanish Tragedy* as a war story in which he captures conflict, not on a national scale alone, but among characters and "little" alliances within the Spanish state. Spain is therefore presented as having

to deal with warfare on two fronts: one abroad and one at home. Though Spain seeks to align its nation with Portugal in preparation for a possible war against “little England,” conflict among members of the Spanish regime show us a nation also at war with itself. As a consequence, because a “house divided against itself cannot stand” (Mark 3:25), a nation at war with itself is destined to be destroyed, not from without, but from within.

The Spanish Tragedy is initially set in the courts of both Spain and Portugal where Revenge and the Ghost of Andrea sit and watch and serve for chorus in this dramatic mystery (1.1.90). As Andrea begins his monologue in the opening scene, he immediately draws the audience into a world of contention within a single body politic. Says Andrea, “When this eternal substance of my soul did live imprisoned in my wanton flesh, each in their function serving other’s need, I was a courtier in the Spanish court” (1.1.1-4). Crosbie in his *Philosophies of Retribution* says that Kyd is alluding to an Aristotelian philosophy which concludes that the body is merely a prison for the soul, thus depicting the relationship between the soul and body “as antagonistic, as one of prisoner to prison” (27). When we study antagonism between body and soul and attempt to understand how it fits into the scope of the play, I believe that Kyd implicitly uses the physical body as an allusion to Spain’s governing political body and how a single unified entity can be at odds with itself. Essentially, the opposition within the physical body becomes a metaphor for the inner conflict within the Spanish body politic that leads to Spain to implode.

Not only does the opening scene draw the reader into the world of contention within a single body politic, it also sets the tone for the subsequent war theme that embodies the text. Andrea’s character exemplifies this theme, having been killed in a seemingly unchivalrous manner (1.4.21-26) fighting in Spain’s war against Portugal. Yet, there is a sort of medieval

knightly mystique about this dutiful courtier who fights in a war for which he is not motivated by nationalism, but by his love for fair aristocratic Bel-Imperia (1.4.10-11). Andrea, courtier turned soldier, joins the war only to prove worthy of Bel-Imperia's beauty. Of Bel-Imperia, Andrea says, "my descent, though not ignoble, yet inferior far to gracious fortunes of my tender youth. For there, in prime and pride of all my years, by duteous service and deserving love in secret I possessed a worthy dame which hight sweet Bel-Imperia by name" (1.1.5-11).

Because Andrea was of lower descent than Bel-Imperia, they had to enter into a secret affair considering the "politics" involving marriage and daughters of the aristocracy. The secrecy not only attempts to hide their relationship from other characters, but what little detail is given about their union creates an aura of mystery and ambiguity for Kyd's audience. Ann Basso believes that Andrea's language gives us insight into the true nature of the union. In her work, "Bel-Imperia: The (Early) Modern Woman in Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*," Basso states that "Andrea refers to himself as a 'lover' (3.15.38) confiding that he has 'possessed' (1.1.10) the high born lady; these sexually loaded words strongly suggest that sexual intercourse has taken place" (19). The true nature of the union is important because sexuality, mainly female sexuality, was very important during the Renaissance. Even attempting to discern Andrea and Bel-Imperia's union brings us into the real world of the sixteenth century where a woman's sexuality was often a question of concern. Patricia Grieve in *The Eve of Spain* says:

There was a widespread belief in Counter-Reformation Spain that chastity was to be valued above all other virtues for women and that it was the most vulnerable quality... The unchaste woman, in this view, posed not only a threat to the social order, but a real danger to the salvation of men's souls (114).

In a sixteenth-century world that dichotomized women as either “virtuous and chaste or seductive and deceptive” (Saylor) based on their sexual experience, to characterize Bel-Imperia’s union with Andrea as sexual casts her character as seductive and deceptive according to sixteenth-century social standards.

If we are not yet ready to characterize Bel-Imperia as seductive and deceptive, another way we can interpret Andrea’s word choice is to put them in an emotionally romantic context. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines *lover* one way as “A person who feels fondness or regard towards another; a friend, a well-wisher.” Thus, we can interpret *lover* in a more emotional sense rather than physical. Also, the word *possessed* means “To own, to have or gain ownership of; to have (wealth or material objects) as one’s own; to hold as property” (OED). *Possessed* insinuates that in some fashion Andrea “owned” Bel-Imperia. Other than father-daughter relationships, when referencing male-female relations, the most common use of the words *possession* or *ownership* in the Renaissance period was to describe men owning women in marriage. This is not to say that the two were married, but that we may be able to find a balance between an illicit sexual union and a marital union and say that their relationship was at the least emotionally romantic in nature. Casting Bel-Imperia’s union as emotionally romantic will be important when we examine her relationship with Horatio because it may show a progression (or digression in Bel-Imperia’s attitude toward her arranged marriage with Balthazar.

Bel-Imperia and Andrea’s union challenges sixteenth-century aristocratic conventions considering that arranged marriages were common ways to solidify political unions. Being a courtier, Andrea has no utilitarian political value since the King of Spain cannot use a marriage between Andrea and Bel-Imperia to form an alliance with another country. Andrea and Bel-Imperia must therefore pursue a covert relationship to stay clear of any backlash from Bel-

Imperia's father or uncle. However, competition between Bel-Imperia and Lorenzo ensues when Lorenzo finds out about Bel-Imperia and Andrea's covert affair. As we will see later in the play, when Bel-Imperia asks Lorenzo why he imprisoned her, he lies and says he was protecting her from her father's anger due to her secret affair with Andrea (3.10.68-69). Although Lorenzo conceals his true motive, the truth is that Lorenzo did indeed find out about Bel-Imperia and Andrea's relationship (3.10.54-55). Even the Duke of Castile, Bel-Imperia's father, seems to have found out about her and Andrea's relationship when he says, "It is not now as when Andrea lived; we have forgotten and forgiven that and thou are graced with a happier love" (3.14.111-114). It is not clear how Castile finds out about the relationship but Lorenzo has a spy in Pedregano who feeds Lorenzo "intel" on Bel-Imperia's whereabouts and maneuvers.

Like a secret agent Pedregano continues his close surveillance of Bel-Imperia as she develops her secret union with Horatio. Having lost Andrea, Bel-Imperia seeks to solidify a subsequent union that will aid her in her efforts to revenge her first lover's death. Says Bel-Imperia, "how can love find harbor in my breast till I revenge the death of my beloved? Yes, second love shall further my revenge." Bel-Imperia seeks to employ Horatio in her revenge plot to "spite the Prince that wrought [Andrea's] end" (1.4.68). In doing so, Bel-Imperia is continuing to challenge social conventions by forming another secret union with someone who is also of a lower social status, which brings Bel-Imperia and Horatio to discuss the dangers of engaging in such a covert affair (2.2).

Bel-Imperia: But wheron dost thou chiefly meditate

Horatio: On dangers past and pleasures to ensue

Balthazar: [*aside*] On pleasures past and dangers to ensue

Bel-Imperia: What dangers and what pleasures dost thou mean?

Horatio: Dangers of war, and pleasures of our love.

Lorenzo: [*aside*] Dangers of death, but pleasures none at all.

Bel-Imperia: Let danger go. Thy war shall be with me... Be this our warring peace, or peaceful war (2.2.26-40).

In this passage Horatio considers his and Bel-Imperia's secret love affair dangerous because, if found out, their affair could lead (and eventually does lead) to what Horatio calls "war."

Because Horatio is the son of a knight marshal (military officer and a magistrate to the aristocracy), Horatio could be familiar with some of the adverse affects associated with crossing the aristocracy. The most severe result may be death itself. The death penalty could come by malicious and unlawful means. Hence the reason when Horatio says to Bel-Imperia, "... return we now into your father's sight; dangerous suspicion waits on our delight" (2.2.54 – 55), sitting secretly nearby, on-looking Lorenzo replies, "Ay, danger mixed with jealous despite shall send thy soul into eternal night" (2.2.56 – 57). Lorenzo's quote shows how maliciously unlawful some members of the court can be. Therefore, when Horatio mentions the dangers of "war," he speaks of the possibility of deadly conflict.

Kyd's antonymic use of war-like language in act 2, scene 2, plays on the political-war theme of the drama and makes a distinction between characters who seek war and characters who seek peace. Bel-Imperia and Andrea represent the peace seekers who, like two peacefully allied countries, strive for a relationship based on conditions and terms of accord. A key word used in this passage to describe their peaceful relations is the word *amity*. Says Bel-Imperia, "Then be thy father's pleasant bower the field, where first we vowed a mutual amity" (2:2:41-42). One can only speculate from the passage as to what the vow entailed. But considering that variations of *friend* are used 41 times in the play (although different versions of the text may vary), and this passage is the only passage in the play that uses the word *amity*, there must be a reason Kyd chooses to use the word here instead of *friendship*.

One way to read this passage is that the mutual vow of amity indicates a peaceful clandestine marriage. Augustine of Hippo, whose writings about marriage heavily influenced marriage doctrine even up through the Renaissance, used the word *amity* to denote a marital relationship (Lasnoski). Also, in the sixteenth century, marriage was based on the theory of consent which meant that marriage was a legally binding contract based solely on the prospective couple's spoken vows¹. Along with the theory of consent, couples needed to publicize the marriage in local parishes in what was considered the ecclesiastically approved path to marriage (Waterworth). A couple who exchanged marriage vows but did not publicize the marriage through church solemnization are said to have contracted a clandestine marriage. A good example of this is found in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* when the Duchess says, "I have heard lawyers say, a contract in a chamber... is absolute marriage" (1.1.478-479). Although there were various reasons why couples did not want to publicize marriages, it was often because they wanted to keep it a secret from obtrusive friends and family members who would otherwise disapprove. A good example is found in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. To escape notice of Romeo's and Juliet's feuding families, who would have never allowed the two to wed, Romeo seeks to secretly contract marriage with Juliet to which she responds "although I joy in thee, I have no joy of this contract tonight: it is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden" (2.2.117-119).

One purpose of consent law was to protect women from being forced or coerced into unwanted marriages by unscrupulous want-to-be husbands or obtrusive family members, especially those who sought to achieve economic or political gain through the arrangement. The

¹ Applied also to England. Legal age for contracting marriage without parental consent was 14 for boys and 12 for girls. It was not until Hardwick's Marriage ACT of 1753 when English law required those under 21 (not being widows or widowers) to have parental consent to marry. For more information, read Alan McFarlane's *Marriage and Love in England*, page 127.

reality, however, is that many families, mainly at the aristocratic level, believed that parents or other respected family members should have the power to arrange marriages for their children. The King of Spain represents this school of thought when he says, “Young virgins must be ruled by their [kinfolk]” (2.4.43). Therefore, when we couple Augustine’s teachings with the law of consent, Kyd’s portrayal of two lovers exchanging a vow of amity could possibly signal a marriage vow, especially since secret marriages could be easily and informally contracted. If this is the case, when we move from Bel-Imperia’s relationship with Andrea to her union with Horatio, it could be that Bel-Imperia is becoming more attached, more committed and more involved with her second lover. On the other hand, a clandestine marriage could also signal that she is becoming more disinterested and defiant to sixteenth-century hegemonic marriage practices to the point that she contracts a clandestine marriage with Horatio to symbolically assert her defiance.

Another way we can view Kyd’s use of *amity* is that he is using the term to cleverly draw the audience’s attention to the play’s political context. For instance, not only was *amity* used in an Augustinian fashion to describe marriage, but *amity* was used to denote peaceful relations between two nations (OED). An historical example of this word being used in a political context is in a letter from Sir Robert Cecil to the Earl of Essex about an incident in 1597 between Queen Elizabeth and the King of Poland. In the letter, Cecil recaps the story of how the Polish Ambassador brought a message from the King of Poland expressing his grievance with Elizabeth. The King of Poland accused Elizabeth of breaking both the law of nature and of nations when she allegedly allowed “his [merchants and servants] to be spoyled without restitution” (Wright 478). The King claimed the Queen did so because of the “auncient amitie between Spain and him” (Wright 479). Therefore, since *amity* is also used in a political context

to describe a peaceful relationship between nations, this idea ties into act 2, scene 2, where Bel-Imperia and Horatio use political language to describe their peaceful relationship.

Kyd's use of war language extends also to Bel-Imperia and Horatio's near sexual experience. Like two soldiers who die fighting side-by-side in battle, the two liken their near-sexual experience to death on the battlefield. The *Norton Anthology of Renaissance Drama* notes that in act 2, scene 4, "The 'dying' the lovers speak of has the connotation of sexual surrender and orgasm" (27). The sexual encounter would make the union even more dangerous considering that, as Bárbara Mujica mentions, "...legal codes established by the Visigoths and still in force in early modern Spain, stipulated strict controls on women's sexual conduct. A father who discovered his daughter having sexual relations in his house was entitled to kill both her and her lover" (Mujica). This could be why, when Horatio asks Bel-Imperia where they should meet for "trials of war," she says to meet at his father's pleasant bower of the field because "the court would be dangerous" (2.2.44).

Bel-Imperia's unions with Andrea and Horatio in contrast to her arranged marriage with Balthazar highlight a major difference between love matches and some aristocratic arranged marriages. Although some aristocratic couples whose marriages were arranged developed feelings of love for one another, unlike love matches (such as Bel-Imperia's unions with Andrea and Horatio), the initial purpose of arranged aristocratic marriages was to solidify political alliances. The beginning of act 2, scene 3, outlines the King of Spain's political agenda when he says, "Advise thy king to make this marriage up, for strengthening of our late-confirmed league..." (10-13). The King of Spain sought to align his government with Portugal's by arranging a marriage between his niece Bel-Imperia and Balthazar, son of the Viceroy of Portugal. Through Bel-Imperia and Balthazar's arranged marriage, Kyd's text re-imagines the

Iberian Union – the historical alliance between Spain and Portugal. Although there were many reasons for the historical Iberian Union, from political and religious tension to territorial expansion, what we glean from Hieronimo's first court masque is that the King of Spain wants to gain military strength for a possible war against an English regime that had defeated both Spain and Portugal in the past (1.4.134-179). When Hieronimo presents the masque he "[Enters] *with a drum, three knights, each his scutcheon. Then he fetches three kings; they take their crowns and them captive*" (1.4.137-138).

Hieronimo later reveals the mystery of the masque, which narrates past wars between Portugal and England on one hand and Spain and England on the other. The first two English knights, Robert, Earl of Gloucester (1.4.42) and Edmond, Earle of Kent are said to have conquered Portuguese kings. Regarding Robert's conquest, the King of Spain says to the ambassador of Portugal, "By this you see that which may comfort both your king and you, and make your late discomfort seem the less" (1.4.147-148). To Edmond's conquest, the King of Spain says to the ambassador, "This is another special argument that Portingal may deign to bear our yoke, when it by little England hath been yoked" (1.4.158-160). However, the end of the masque shows a slight turning of the war-tables when Spain's King is too captured by an English knight. To which the ambassador responds, "This is an argument for our viceroy that Spain may not insult for her success, since English warriors likewise conquered Spain and made them bow their knees to Albion" (1.4.168-171).

In depicting Portugal's and Spain's defeats to England, David Phillips in *Promoting the Nation* believes that Kyd is using the masque to purposely promote English nationalism. This view coincides with the notion that *The Spanish Tragedy* alludes to the historical national conflict between Spain and England (41). While promoting English nationalism, Phillips

believes that, by “[playing] upon his audience’s fears of foreigners in general and Spain in particular,” *The Spanish Tragedy* “serves... as the model for the construction of an alien, specific Spanish other” (29). This construction of the “Spanish other” is steeped in Black Legend assumption (Phillips 16-17) that, according Charles Gibson, is “The accumulated tradition of propaganda and Hispanophobia according to which Spanish imperialism is regarded as cruel, bigoted, exploitative and self-righteous in excess of reality” (136). Spanish Imperialism was a major concern in late sixteenth-century Europe. From a religious standpoint, Henry Kamen argues that the Black Legend was created by both Protestants and Catholics who resisted Spanish imperialism (Toleration and Dissent, 1). On a national level, Eric Griffin in *English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain* states that the English and the French especially feared what the Iberian Union could accomplish (68). Although it is not certain whether Kyd is purposely promoting English nationalism or propagating Hispanophobia, Kyd’s text does reveal Spain’s imperialist ambitions motivated by national conflict with England.

In light of the historical Spanish-English conflict, some argue that Kyd’s historical account of England’s wars with Spain and Portugal is inaccurate. Because the play is fictional, produced for entertainment purposes, Kyd’s portrayal of English-Spanish relations may be, as Griffin mentions, more “literary than literal.” Considering the historical backdrop against which the play is written, trying to determine Kyd’s historical accuracy may not be as important as understanding Spain’s ironic dilemma. Amid national conflict, Spain does not collapse at the hands of an opposing army, but falls due to the “little wars” within its own regime.

Not only are Spain’s little wars detrimental to its imperialistic goals, but the Iberian Union collapses because it is built on the faulty foundation of Bel-Imperia’s unwanted arranged marriage. Although arranged marriages were common in the sixteenth century, *The Spanish*

Tragedy shows an extreme case of an oppressed, marginalized woman in Bel-Imperia who decides to kick and spurn against the sociopolitical marital conventions. Bel-Imperia therefore embodies certain marginalized women who opposed or even rebelled against sixteenth-century patriarchal hegemonic practices. The King of Spain, on the other hand, exemplifies patriarchal hegemony when he wants his brother to manipulate Bel-Imperia's will to push his political agenda. Says the King of Spain, "Now brother, you must take some little pains to win Bel-Imperia from her will" (2.3.41-42) and "Endeavor you to win your daughter's thoughts; if she give back, all this will come to naught" (2.3.49-50). Castile also exemplifies patriarchal hegemony when he proposes to manipulate Bel-Imperia saying that if she does not love (marry) Balthazar she risks losing her father's love (2.3.8).

By act 3, scene 14, the King of Spain and Castile move forward with the marriage arrangements and, due to sixteenth-century patriarchal hegemonic practices, Bel-Imperia, the center piece of the Iberian Union, is not even present when the marriage is being arranged. This is important when reading *The Spanish Tragedy* considering that Bel-Imperia's independence is a critical issue. Her marriage arrangement stems from an old Roman Republic practice called "contrive sale" where fathers sold their daughters like property to their new owners (husbands) as wives, and the "property" did not have to be present during the exchange. As in contrive sale, Bel-Imperia's absence is indicative of her extreme lack of free agency. Andrea Butt in her work "Women Revengers in Renaissance Tragedies" reiterates critic Roger Stilling who says that, "[Castile and the King's] colossal sense of their own importance makes it impossible for them to take Bel-Imperia seriously as a free agent with her own mind and heart..." Much like contrive sale, Bel-Imperia is being treated more like soulless property than a person with freewill.

The lack of freewill is one of Bel-Imperia's major concerns with the arranged marriage because she fears that if marries Balthazar she will lose her independence. In a discussion with Balthazar and Lorenzo, Bel-Imperia expresses her fear of losing independence when she says, "As those that what they love are loath and fear to lose" (3.10.99). According to the *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, Bel-Imperia's statement could be read as a "fear of losing what she cherishes most – her independence" (Bevington, Maus, Rasmussen, and Engle 47). Her disinterest in the arranged union shows that Bel-Imperia, like a country refusing annexation into another, wants to remain an independent self-governing body. Kaylen Wade in "Sole Ruler of Mine Own" mentions that "from the start, [Bel-Imperia] has a sense of her own agency" and that she "actively controls her own fate, resisting any attempts from her brother, father, or suitor to exert control over her" (52). Bel-Imperia's remarks about losing her independent-self are also a parallel to the Iberian Union. The Iberian Union is historically referred to as the "Spanish Captivity" considering that Spain, under Philip II, "took" Portugal (Stanislawski), which made the union more a Spanish takeover than mutual alliance. Like the Spanish Captivity, coming into a marriage alignment with Balthazar means that Bel-Imperia could be "taken over." Hence, when Balthazar says, "Then, fair, let Balthazar your keeper be" (3.10.101), she cunningly retorts against the idea.

In remaining an independent self-governing body, not only does Bel-Imperia operate like single unified country, but she is also at-one with herself. Being at-one with herself means that she is at peace within and is not conflicted within her own body politic. Although controlled by the males in her family, inwardly Bel-Imperia is in control of her wants and desires. Her personality is not dualistic; she is not possessed by a binary oppositional soul that causes her to question her own sense of purpose. Rather, she is resolved in her plan for revenge. She does not

vacillate between conformity and nonconformity because conformity would result in Bel-Imperia being at-one with others but conflicted within herself. Bel-Imperia's refusing to conform is reminiscent of a quote from Socrates: "It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict me" (Moruzzi 127). Most of all, Bel-Imperia is not looking for annexation (as in the arranged marriage) as a means to gain power, because, as Wade says, "Bel-imperia is already established as a powerful figure in her own right." Rather, although Bel-Imperia later forms an alliance with Hieronimo, she is fully content on making war with her enemies by herself and for herself when she says to Hieronimo, "Shouldst thou neglect the love thou shouldst retain and give it over and devise no more, myself should send their hateful souls to hell, that wrought his downfall with extremest death" (4.1.26-29).

The idea of being at-one with self and others is an important theme to recognize because Spain's inner turmoil shows a great lack of oneness between characters. Therefore, when we think about Spain being at war with itself, it seems that Kyd is playing on the idea of atonement or *at-one-ment*. Atonement is the "condition of being at one with others; unity of feeling, harmony, concord, agreement" (OED). When we couple Spain's need for reconciliation with the play's presentation of bloody violence, although not explicitly stated in the play, it seems that the drama implicitly echoes a Biblical notion of atonement. Biblical atonement had a dual function. According to Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it unto you *to offer* upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls; for this blood shall make an atonement for the soul" (Geneva Bible). In order to make atonement, priests offered blood on the altar on behalf of the ancient Israelites for their sins so could they become or remain at-one

with Yahweh. In the New Testament, Christ is said to have shed His blood once and for all to make atonement for and allow sinners to be reconciled to or be at-one with God the Father (Romans 5:11, Geneva Bible). Along with the act of reconciliation, atonement operated as a “Propitiation of an offended or injured person, by reparation of wrong or injury” (OED). Kyd seems to implicitly use the idea of atonement in *The Spanish Tragedy*, especially when Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo achieve full atonement by shedding the blood of their enemies. Not only does shedding blood allow them to be at-one or have peace within themselves, Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo are appeased when they kill their offenders.

As an aristocratic daughter, Bel-Imperia’s want for self-governance and self at-one-ment shows a level of feminine individualism that was in stark contrast to sixteenth-century hegemonic sociopolitical standards. With individualism comes a level of autonomy and mobility with which many young women in the aristocracy were not privileged. They could not go where they wanted, do what they wanted, or be with whom they wanted. Lorenzo imprisoning Bel-Imperia (3.9) indicates his fear of Bel-Imperia’s feminine individualism and he feels his only means of constraining Bel-Imperia’s mobility is to place her in prison. Bel-Imperia’s imprisonment culminates in the already-growing, extreme bitter sibling rivalry where Bel-Imperia refers to Lorenzo, not as her brother, but her enemy. Says *Bel-Imperia*:

Thou art no brother, but an enemy! Else wouldst thou not have used thy sister so,
first, to affright me with thy weapons drawn, and with extremes abuse my
company, and then to hurry me, like whirlwind’s rage, amidst a crew of thy
confederates, and clap me up where non might come at me...” (3.10.25 – 31)

Not only does Lorenzo imprison Bel-Imperia, he put her in solitary confinement. Due to the passage’s use of war-like language such as *enemy* and *confederate*, we should view Bel-Imperia

as not only being treated like a criminal, but as a prisoner of war who, though a daughter of the aristocracy, is being treated worse than the actual prisoner of war, Balthazar.

Considering that Kyd seems to have a keen interest in classical literature, Lorenzo's discourse in act 3, scene 10 is reminiscent of Aesop's fable "The wolf and the lamb." Lorenzo is the Aesopian wolf-like character who brings false accusations against Bel-Imperia and uses empty excuses as nothing more than a "pretext for his tyranny." Yet, unlike the lamb in Aesop's fable, Bel-Imperia is not yet ready to be devoured by Lorenzo's maneuvers. Like a good soldier, Bel-Imperia has combat tactics and military maneuvers of her own. She is cunning, sinister and slick. Bel-Imperia is not passive and certainly does not act as a helpless victim cowering in fear, believing that she is left with no options except to give up. Rather, Bel-Imperia is bloodthirsty and she will stop at nothing to exact revenge, even to the point that she forms an alliance with Hieronimo saying she will "join with thee to revenge Horatio's death" (4.1.48).

Considering their violent intentions, Bel-Imperia and Horatio's relationship is unique because it questions whether or not Kyd wants his audience to excuse their violent intentions. On the one hand, some believe that Hieronimo should be condemned for breaking a type of moral law that vengeance belongs to God (Ardolino). This view leans on the Biblical principle, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord" (Hebrews 10:30). On the other hand, others believe that "revenge is justified when it is sanctioned by God" (Ardolino). As Ardolino points out, this view assumes that Hieronimo acts as a representative of English nationalism and that Hieronimo "ultimately represents England against the Spanish court." As a premise for this interpretation, critics parallel Hieronimo with certain Biblical characters that Yahweh called to exact revenge against Babylon. In this sense, Kyd's Protestant audience may

justify Hieronimo's revenge because his actions represent God-sanctioned revenge on Catholic Spain.

In light of the two conflicting views on justified revenge, to determine justification of murderous revenge, we can look to how the text treats the subject. In doing so, what we see at the end of the play is that Bel-Imperia's and Hieronimo's actions are justified considering that the two are taken to "eternal ease" after they die – Bel-Imperia "to those joys that vestal virgins and fair queens possess" (4.5.21 – 22) and Hieronimo to "where Orpheus plays, adding sweet pleasures to eternal days" (4.5.23 – 24). In essence, Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia's justified revenge can be likened to soldiers having to kill at war time. As John Lyly says, "The rules of fair play do not apply in love and war" (Euphues) and Bel-Imperia had long declared war since her first love's unchivalrous murder.

When we compare Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia's union to others in the play, one important characteristic that separates their union from most others is that the union is based on mutual agreement. The primary problem within the Spanish body politic is that its imperialistic ambitions are fueled by coercion, manipulation, force, and control. Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo's union, on the other hand, is built on mutual consent. Although Basso believes Bel-Imperia coerces Hieronimo to come into alliance with her (Basso 14), language in the following passage does not suggest coercion, but that Bel-Imperia merely urges Hieronimo to realize what has happened to his son:

But monstrous father, to forget so soon
The death of those whom they with care and cost
Have tendered so, thus careless should be lost!
Myself, a stranger in respect of thee,
So loved his life as still I wish their deaths,
Nor shall his death be unrevenged by me (4.1.2-23).

Up to this point, Hieronimo admits that he was still not fully aware, or fully convinced about what happened to Horatio. Says Hieronimo, “Pardon, oh, pardon, Bel-Imperia, my fear and care in not believing it, nor think I thoughtless think upon a mean to let his death be unrevenged at full” (4.1.38-41). Hieronimo never objected to revenging his son; he merely did not know, or could not believe, what had taken place. Bel-Imperia merely helped Hieronimo understand what happened. When we take this into account, the union seems more mutual than coercive.

Being mutually agreed means that Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo are in one accord. The idea of *accord* is an important element in the play. For instance, in act 3, scene 13, Hieronimo alludes to the idea of being in one accord through use of musical analogy. Says Hieronimo, “And thou and I and she will sing a song, three parts in one, but all of discords framed” (3.13.172 – 173). Hieronimo is saying that he, the old man Don Bazulto, and Isabel will sing a song in which they will unify three different parts into one. Yet, Hieronimo says that they will sing the cord in such a way that these concurrent parts will be composed in discord. Essentially, the song will sound inharmonious because the cords will not be in agreement, symbolic of the inharmonious chaos between characters and unions in the play. A Biblical example is located in Matthew 18:19: “If two of you shall *agree* in earth upon anything, whatsoever they shall desire, it shall be given them of my Father which is in heaven.” The word *agree* in Matthew 18 is the Greek word *συμφωνέω*, transliterated as *symphōnéō*, and is from where the modern English word *symphony* derived (Bible Hub). Like a symphony orchestra, the play uses music as an analogy of how a body politic is supposed to operate, having different parts to create one harmonic sound. Like musical cords, when people or entities are not in agreement the result is disorder and Spain is wrecked therewith.

In light of the play's use of musical analogy, an important scene to examine against this theme is the dumb show in act 3, scene 15: "Enter a dumb show [of two torchbearers and Hymen]". In a play that uses music analogously to convey a message about harmony, the mime show stands out because the scene has no music; no spoken word; no sound. Because the dumb show is silent, the audience is left to focus on the production of the physical body. This could be an allusion to the audience's need to focus, not solely on what characters are saying, but how they are acting as they represent the Spanish body politic.

Trying to ascertain a message without spoken cues can be difficult. What evidence we have is that two torchbearers enter holding lit nuptial torches and afterwards Hymen comes in swiftly, blows out the torches and extinguishes them in blood. Ironically, in Greek Mythology, the word "Hymen" was not only the name of the god of marriage, but was used to denote a wedding hymn; the word "hymnal" being a variation of the name "Hymen" (*Theoi Greek Mythology*). Because marriage was supposed to be a joyous occasion accompanied by hymnals, the dumb show and the silence therein could be a dramatic effect used to magnify the tragic "feel" of the play. It is not clear, however, who or what the nuptial torches represent in the dumb show. In Greek literature, nuptial torches "stood metonymically for weddings" (Hersch 165). Therefore, the torches could represent Bel-Imperia and Balthazar and their arranged marriage. What is certain is that the nuptial torches are symbolic of marriage and, due to disharmony or lack of harmony between characters, even the most supposedly benevolent of unions will end in tragedy.

One marital union that ends in tragedy is Hieronimo and Isabel's who make up the only evident marital union in the play. Ironically, in a play that emphasizes oneness, the only explicit marital union has the least amount of togetherness on stage. Their marriage parallels with

Spain's body politic because Hieronimo, like the King of Spain, is so preoccupied with outward affairs that he is oblivious to the problems within his own "house." In Hieronimo's case, he is so distracted by bringing Horatio's murderers to justice that he fails to realize his wife's "madness" that causes her to "run lunatic" (3.8.5-6) and eventually leads to her suicide (4.2.38). In this instance, Bel-Imperia can be likened to the "foreign other" with whom Hieronimo seeks an alliance. Isabel then represents a domestic empire that is conflicted within her own body politic – conflicted against Hieronimo and conflicted against herself (evident in her suicide). Eventually what we see is Hieronimo pushing his foreign policy in preparation for a war abroad (against Lorenzo and Balthazar) while obviously neglecting certain critical matters within his own household. This causes him to spend more time with the "other woman," Bel-Imperia, than his own wife. Ironically, though Hieronimo builds a strong alliance with Bel-Imperia, his weakened household eventually implodes in on itself culminating in Isabel's eventual suicide.

Before Isabel commits suicide she makes a striking statement that shows a breakdown or disconnect in her and Hieronimo's union: "none but I bestir." This "none but I" signifies the aloneness Isabel feels and the notion that she is the only one in the marriage seemingly concerned about revenging Horatio. Out of seeming sense of abandonment, Isabel accuses Hieronimo of being negligent and hesitant in avenging Horatio's death and even claims that he has forgiven Horatio's murderers (4.2.30-33). The fact that this statement comes one scene after Hieronimo says "Now shall I see the fall of Babylon" (4.1.195), not only shows that her assumptions are incorrect, but shows the lack of communication between them considering that Isabel has no knowledge of Hieronimo's revenge plot. The lack of communication is due to Hieronimo and Isabel's lack of togetherness. It is not coincidental that the only character to commit suicide out of a seeming psychotic break is the one who is alone the most, for her suicide

is reminiscent of a biblical principle, “woe unto him that is alone, for he falleth, and there *is* not a second to lift him up” (Ecclesiaste4:10).

Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia on the other hand align and construct a plan to exact revenge against Lorenzo and Balthazar’s confederacy. Their plan is a sort of covert operation.

Hieronimo plans a court masque celebrating Balthazar and Bel-Imperia’s arranged marriage where they intend to kill their unsuspecting enemies. Because Hieronimo is plotting to use his masque as a real-life tragedy, when Balthazar says, “Hieronimo, methinks a comedy would be better” (4.1.155) (since comedies ended with marriage celebrations), Hieronimo excuses his choice for the tragic saying, “Comedies are fit for common wits; but to present a kingly troop withal, give me a stately written tragedy” (4.1.157-159). Lorenzo states that he has seen such a presentation in Paris among the French tragedians, to which Hieronimo responds, “In Paris? Mass, and well remembered” (4.1.169).

Ardolino, in his work, “In Paris? Mass, and Well Remembered,” says that this line refers to the 1572 St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre. Of this event, he says:

The words *Paris* and *Mass* in conjunction with the “French tragedians” allude to the infamous Paris massacre of Huguenots (French Protestants who were mainly Calvinists) on Saint Bartholomew’s day. The occasion for the massacre was the marriage between Margaret, daughter of the Queen-mother Catherine de Medici, and the Protestant Henry of Navarre on August 18, 1572.

Ardolino goes on to explain that Catherine de Medici intended to reconcile Catholics and Protestants through the marriage celebration, but ended in the massacre of Huguenots (405).

Protestant writers likened the event to a French tragedy written and orchestrated by a Machiavellian Catherin de Medici (Ardolino 404). While playing on Protestant sentiment, what

we eventually see is Hieronimo taking on a certain Medician-Machiavellian personae as he plans to kill his enemies when they least expect it – during a wedding celebration.

In doing so, Hieronimo stages a marriage playlet where he calls on Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia to accompany him in the playlet and act various parts to be spoken in various languages (4.1.172-178). The use of diverse languages is reminiscent of the Genesis account of the Tower of Babel. Genesis 11 tells the story about the people of Shinar who wanted to build a tower that reached to the heavens. The reason the people were almost able to accomplish such a feat was because the “whole earth was of one language, and of one speech” (Genesis 11:1). Being of one language and one speech allowed a certain level of unification through communication. Thus, when the people of Shinar say, “let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto the heaven” (11:4), Yahweh says, “Behold, the people is one, and they all have one language, and this they begin to do, neither can they now be stopped from whatsoever they have imagined to do” (11:6). To thwart their plans, Yahweh then says, “Come on, let us go down, and there confound their language, that everyone perceive not another’s speech” (11:7). Confusing the people’s language no longer allowed the people to unite as they did before. Therefore, Hieronimo’s use of diverse languages is symbolic of the level of disunity and disharmony he seeks to create within Babylon-Spain and the Iberian Union saying, “Now shall I see the fall of Babylon, wrought by the heavens in this confusion” (4.1.195 – 196).

The fall of Babylon is not mentioned in Genesis, but *Babylon* is a later developed form of the name *Babel* (Nelson’s 147). Why the name took on a different form throughout the Old Testament is probably due to language shifts over time. Nonetheless, Hieronimo clearly ties the early kingdom of Babel to its later Babylonian empire. But, leading up to the dramatic climax in act 4, scene 1, Kyd uses implicit markers or sign posts throughout the play to point his audience to Hieronimo’s tragic playlet. The way he does this is through characters’ names such as “Bel-

Imperia.” The name “Imperia” means empire which is consistent with the theme of imperialism in the play. However, the name “Bel” is a little more ambiguous. Although the Oxford English Dictionary defines “Bel” as “beautiful,” therefore translating Bel-Imperia one way as “Beautiful Empire,” “Bel” is also translated from the Hebrew word בֶּל (Strong’s #1078), used interchangeably in the Old Testament with the name “Baal,” which are the names of the ancient chief Babylonian deity. The name Balthazar is also a reference to Babylon considering that the name is an “allusion to *Balthazar* (Belshazzar), ‘king of Babylon’, who ‘made a great feast... and drank wine before the thousand’” (OED). The name “Isabel” has a striking resemblance to “Izebel” which is a transliterated form of the name “Jezebel” (Bible Suite, “Jezebel”) who was the queen of Israel and wife of King Ahab who employed prophets of the god Baal (1 King 18:19). By tying the kingdom of Babel to the Babylonian Empire while using markers to point to the play’s main plot, Kyd shows a progression (or digression) from prideful, imperialist ambition to tragic collapse.

Although Spain’s inevitable collapse was initiated by Revenge from the outset of the play, Spain’s collapse begins to show in Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia’s assaults on Lorenzo and Balthazar. Lorenzo and Balthazar, who employ servile mercenaries in Pedrigano and Serberine, make up the most dangerous union in the play, constructed to administer unfair treatment and unjust violence against its opposition. But Lorenzo and Balthazar’s confederacy is destroyed by Bel-Imperia and Hieronimo, Hieronimo having killed Lorenzo and Bel-Imperia having killed Balthazar. Before the trumpets sound the dead march (4.4.219) and the King of Spain and the Viceroy of Portugal exit the stage mourning the losses of loved ones, the Viceroys says, “Spain hath no refuge for a Portingale.” This phrase is significant because it signals the ironic bitter ending and dreaded dissention of a once hopeful and highly sought-after political union. The

irony is that, although the King of Spain sought to align itself with Portugal to prepare for a war abroad, Spain and eventually the Iberian Union, is destroyed from within because of the little wars between people of its own country. Thus, the play fulfills the ancient notion that “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (Mark 3:25).

As the play closes we are reacquainted with the metaphysical union between the ghost of Andrea and Revenge. The union is unique because it also shows a union or connection between the physical and metaphysical realms where Revenge presides over the destinies of characters living in the material world. After each character dies, the spirits are then guided by the Ghost of Andrea and Revenge to their eternal destinations. In a play where alliance and detachment, accord and discord, unity and division are major themes, nothing is more representative of such separation than the eternal separations of the *good* and *evil* characters – the *good* to eternal ease and the *evil* to eternal woes (4.5.46). As Kyd’s tragedy comes to an end, the miseries of the *foes* are only beginning. For as Revenge says, “though death hath end their misery, I’ll there begin their endless tragedies.”

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